

**EPA-ECOS-ASTHO MOA**  
**Environment and Public Health Nexus: EPA-States Collaborative Pilots**  
**August 2017**

**Background:** The success of environmental protection and public health in the United States begins on the front lines of at the state and local levels. EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD) is a vital scientific and technical resource to states and their communities, providing the technical support and training, science-based tools, and innovative approaches and methods they need to meet their highest priority environmental and related public health challenges, while also laying the groundwork for long-term health and prosperity. Collaboration and teamwork with state environmental and health agencies make that all possible. Our state partners provide significant insights into the environmental problems they face and how EPA can best translate our science into well-informed decision tools for states and communities. Through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Environmental Council of States (ECOS) and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), ORD works to advance cooperative initiatives pertaining to public and environmental health.

EPA ORD is funding a new risk communication pilot with ASTHO and ECOS for the project period September 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 as described below. EPA ORD has provided \$25K each to ECOS and ASTHO for this project.

**Expected Outputs**

- At least 6 state case study summaries in fact sheet format
- Evaluate and report on existing risk communication toolkits
- Communicating the Risks of PFCS and HABs webinars showcasing PFAS and HAB state case studies

**Expected Outcomes**

- Establish and maintain diverse public health and environmental partnerships
- Increased understanding of state practices and experiences regarding PFC and HAB health advisories
- Pilots will help create new linkages between EPA and CDC as federal partners

**Communicating the Risks of PFAS and HABs: State Case Studies and Toolkits**

In 2016, both per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and the larger group of perfluorinated compounds (PFCs) arose as a priority issue for states, and harmful algal blooms (HABs) have been an issue for many years.

HABs and PFAS found in water continue to pose problems for state health and environmental agencies. While CDC and EPA have been supporting state and public water systems in their efforts to reduce exposure to HABs in recreational water and PFOA (perfluorooctanoic acid) and PFOS (perfluorooctyl sulfonate) in drinking water, including EPA issuing the health advisory level of 70 parts per trillion, states still issue their own health advisories related to these chemicals. State and territorial health agencies and their environmental counterparts have oversight of the water systems and are responsible for implementing mitigation measures to reduce chemical exposure, as well as communicating these risks. CDC and EPA resources, including EPA's November 2016 PFOA/PFOS Fact Sheet, provide helpful background information and recommendations for state, local and tribal health officials and water system operators, but states still struggle with the risk communication piece for their health advisories. Proper risk communication is needed to inform the public of the issue(s) without alarming them. The type of communication style used for one audience may be different from another, so communication materials need to be tailored to the target audience. There is also the balance of communicating what health departments and water systems operators can and cannot do to address the problems. Information uncertainty also surfaces as an obstacle. What information is picked up by a newspaper and what information is left out? How do you respond to a community that demands biomonitoring? All of these issues need to be considered when communicating an issue and health advisory to the public.

Through this workplan, ASTHO and ECOS will look at how state health and environmental agencies are communicating the risks of PFCs and HABs to the public and collect case studies regarding PFAS and HAB health advisories in states and territories.

ASTHO and ECOS will collect state examples of how state health and environmental agencies have been addressing PFAS and HABs in their jurisdictions, including the wording of the accompanying health advisories and the methods used to communicate them to the public. This will be compiled for ECOS and ASTHO to share with other states who are looking to update or create new advisories in their own jurisdictions. ASTHO will utilize their State Environmental Health Directors (SEHD) peer group to field the request for state examples, and specifically their Risk Communication workgroup to vet the examples and develop the case studies. ECOS will work through its Cross-Media Committee contacts and ECOS members to field the request for state examples. At the end of this workplan, ASTHO and ECOS will also host two webinars showcasing at least three state examples of the PFC and HAB advisories.

### **Objectives and Activities**

The overall goal of this workplan is to collect case studies from state health and environmental agencies regarding their PFC and HAB health advisories and learn about how these state agencies are managing their risk communication of these hazards to the public.

Objective 1: Better understand how state health and environmental agencies are developing and communicating their health advisories regarding PFCs, including PFAS, and HABs.

Activity 1.1: Field formal request to state health officials and their environmental counterparts to participate in case study interviews regarding PFC and HAB health advisories. Develop short list of jurisdictions to interview and the interview protocol.

Activity 1.2: Interview state health and environmental personnel from 6 states (3 each for HABs and PFAS) regarding their advisory language and experiences with developing the advisories (including the use of EPA and CDC materials), rolling them out, and responding to requests from the public concerning the messages.

Activity 1.3: Compile case study interviews and findings in fact sheet format, including links to state advisories.

Objective 2: Evaluate and report on existing risk communication toolkits aimed at supporting state health and environmental agencies in relaying information related to PFCs and HABs to the public.

Activity 2.1: Using case studies and related materials (e.g., EPA, CDC resources), consult state risk communication workgroups regarding key themes for messaging about PFCs and HABs and best formats to roll out health advisories. State partners may bring in their risk communication specialist to participate/facilitate dialogues.

Activity 2.2: Evaluate and report on existing risk communication toolkits (such as the CDC/NCEH PFAS toolkit and EPA's HAB/cyanotoxin risk communication toolbox) using all of the information gathered throughout the project. The toolkit will include such items as key messages and talking points, tips for working with the media, how to engage in conversations with the public around PFCs and HABs, social media guide, and links to external resources (such as EPA and CDC materials and example state health advisories). [Note: Under another ASTHO award (CDC funding), ASTHO will be pilot testing the CDC/NCEH PFAS toolkit in two states and developing lessons learned.]

Activity 2.3: Host two webinars showcasing PFAS and HABs state case studies and risk communication toolkits.

## Draft Timeline for EPA-ECOS-ASTHO MOA Pilot Projects 2017-2018

EPA-ECOS-ASTHO MOA Pilot Projects: Communicating the Risks of PFAS and Harmful Algal Blooms with Case Studies and Toolkit; September 1, 2017-June 30, 2018		
Activity Deadline	Deliverable	Steps Needed to Complete
September 1	Identify states (3 each ASTHO and ECOS) to write case studies on	Field formal request to states (health officials and environmental commissioners) to participate in case study interviews on PFCs (PFAS) or HABs  Select states with regional and program diversity
September 29	Develop a questionnaire to distribute to each state official	Questions should focus on states' experiences with developing advisories (including the use of CDC and EPA materials), rolling them out, and responding to requests from the public concerning the messages
October 27	Request interviews/responses to questionnaire from participating states	
December 1	Compile case study interviews and findings into fact sheets	
February 2018	Consult state risk communication workgroups regarding key themes for messaging around PFCs and HABs and best formats to roll out health advisories	
March 2018	Gather information for toolkits	Facilitate dialogue among state partners and use information from case studies and workgroup communications
May 2018	Evaluate and report on existing risk communication toolkits	Include items like key messages and talking points, tips for working with the media, how to engage in conversations with the public around PFCs and HABs, social media guide, and links to external resources  Existing communication toolkits include the CDC/NCEH PFAS toolkit and EPA's HAB/cyanotoxin risk communication toolbox and management plans
June 2018	Host 2 webinars showcasing a few of the state case studies and risk communication toolkits	1 webinar for PFAS and 1 webinar for HABs

## **Key Contacts**

### ASTHO

Abraham Kulungara  
Senior Director, Environmental Health  
[akulungara@astho.org](mailto:akulungara@astho.org)

Kerry Wyss  
Director, Environmental Health  
[kwyss@astho.org](mailto:kwyss@astho.org)

### ECOS

Carolyn Hanson  
Deputy Director  
[chanson@ecos.org](mailto:chanson@ecos.org)

Sarah Grace Longworth  
Project Associate  
[slongworth@ecos.org](mailto:slongworth@ecos.org)

### EPA

Lisa Matthews  
Senior Advisor and State Liaison  
Office of Research and Development  
[matthews.lisa@epa.gov](mailto:matthews.lisa@epa.gov)

Jacquelyn Menghrajani  
Children's Environmental Health Coordinator  
Region 9 (SMP assignment with ORD)  
[hayes.jacquelyn@epa.gov](mailto:hayes.jacquelyn@epa.gov)

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## **EPA Coordination Team**

Lisa Matthews (Chair)

### ORD

Lou D'Amico (NCEA)  
Michelle Latham (SSWR)  
Lahne Mattas-Curry (risk communication)  
Jacquelyn Menghrajani (public health, working with Lisa)

### OW

Nikki Bass (Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water)  
Lesley D'Anglada (Office of Science & Technology)  
Hannah Holsinger (Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water)  
Jamie Strong (Office of Science & Technology)

### Regions

Carole Braverman (R5, lead region for water)  
Marie O'Shea (R2, lead region for chemicals)